DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 478 838 HE 036 103

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TITLE	Democratic Classroom and Global Citizenship: The Contribution of One-Unit Seminars.
PUB DATE	2003-04-00
NOTE	34p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (Chicago, IL, April 21-25, 2003).
PUB TYPE	Reports - Evaluative (142) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Citizenship Education; Civics; *College Faculty; Course Content; *Democratic Values; Higher Education; *Seminars

ABSTRACT

This study explored democratic learning environments at one research university. The focus was on the qualitative outcomes of a study of one-unit reading and discussion seminars created in response to the events of September 11, 2001. Faculty members created 49 seminars, each of which limited enrollment to 15 students. The findings suggest that such seminars have the potential to enhance undergraduate learning in a way that promotes outcomes consistent with the development of skills and dispositions relevant to civic competence. (Contains 56 references.) (Author/SLD)

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Democratic Classrooms and Global Citizenship: The Contribution of One-Unit Seminars

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Paper presented at:
The Annual Meeting of the
American Educational Research Association, Chicago
April 2003

HE036103

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Democratic Learning and Global Citizenship: The Contribution of One-Unit Seminars

Abstract:
The authors explore democratic learning environments at one research university. More specifically, the authors examine qualitative outcomes from a study of one-unit reading and discussion seminars created in response to the events of September 11. The authors suggest that such seminars have the potential to enhance undergraduate learning in a way that promotes outcomes consistent with the development of skills and dispositions relevant to civic competency.

Introduction

Over the past 20 years, the quality and purpose of undergraduate education, and the nature of student learning in particular, has been highly debated (ACPA, 1994; AAC, 1985; Astin, 1991, 1993; Boyer, 1987; Kuh, 1999; Study Group, 1984; Wingspread Group, 1993). Whereas learning outcomes traditionally have focused more on the simple accumulation of academic knowledge, there has been a shift to viewing learning through a more complex lens (Astin, 1993; Gardner, 1993; Kuh, 1996; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). For example, some have argued that learning should result in the development of multiple skills beyond simple subject competency, including critical thinking, cultural understanding, capacity for dialogue, and civic competency (Barber, 1992; Boyte, & Hollander, 1999). Such learning represents a more sophisticated approach that combines notions of intellectual knowledge and skills linked to citizenship. The goal not only is to engage students in their immediate studies, but to frame their development within the context of preparing them for civic engagement during and beyond their college years (Barber, 1992; Battistoni, 1985; Hamrick, 1998; Rhoads, 1997a, 1997b, 1998).

At present, many faculty and student affairs professionals are pushing for greater emphasis on the role universities play in preparing students for democratic citizenship

(Engstrom, Hallock, Riemer, & Rawls, 2000; Rhoads & Black, 1995; Manning, 1994). For example, Barber (1992) noted that when we speak of education we must always be careful to situate education's role *in a democracy* (our emphasis). He lamented that, "We seem to have forgotten the role public education plays in preparing young Americans to be young American citizens" (2001, p. 19). Barber also pointed out that colleges and universities must assume a unique role in the preparation of citizens. Relatedly, in a study of citizenship and student activism, Hamrick (1998) revealed the telling statistic that 90 percent of Americans surveyed by the American Council on Education identified the development of good citizens as a central purpose of higher education. As Hamrick explained, "Preparing students for mature participation in the civic life of a democracy is consistently cited as a primary purpose of higher education" (1998, p. 449). She also pointed out that student affairs professionals have demonstrated a strong commitment to civic education. However, proponents of education for citizenship face many challenges, especially at larger research universities.

Although research universities are home to many of the world's leading academic authorities, their professors often have limited contact with undergraduates (Boyer Commission, 1998). For example, Fairweather (1996) pointed out that *all* types of institutions tend to favor research over teaching, but this tendency is especially pronounced, and therefore of greatest concern, at research institutions. Fairweather argued that engaging in research is the most prestigious activity for faculty members and is reflected in time allocated to teaching: At research universities faculty spend only 42 percent of their time on teaching activities, while at liberal arts colleges faculty spend 68 percent of their time on teaching activities.

Lack of contact between students and faculty presents a significant challenge in so far as such contact is seen as crucial to enhancing critical thinking abilities, student persistence, and academic success (Astin, 1993; Boyer Commission, 1998; Tinto, 1993). Furthermore, meaningful contact with faculty is seen as a key facet of citizenship education, evidenced in part by developmental outcomes associated with service learning (Giles & Eyler, 1998; Mendel-Reyes, 1998). Consequently, a central concern at research universities relates to how such institutions can provide increased student-centered environments that foster meaningful student-faculty interaction. From the perspective of student development, the goal is to produce learning experiences which bolster citizenship capabilities.

How might we facilitate the development of multiple skills required by a broad definition of learning oriented toward citizenship? We suggest in this paper that one-unit reading and discussion seminars have the potential to enhance undergraduate learning in a way that promotes outcomes consistent with civic competency. Thus, a central concern of this study, and why it has relevance to this journal, is our interest in the development of skills and dispositions relevant to citizenship education.

We also argue that the tragic events of September 11 and the increased shift toward a more global society call for particular forms of citizenship education. Accordingly, we see democratic educational theory and the construction of democratic learning environments as vital components in preparing students as active, global citizens. Furthermore, we see both faculty and student affairs practitioners as key players in promoting such environments, both as transformative agents pushing for appropriate structural changes and as one-unit seminar instructors guiding a more citizenship-oriented learning experience.

Democratic learning environments are sites of educator-student partnership where dialogue leads to the sharing of opinions and experiences that validate student voices and challenge individuals to reflect upon those exchanges (Manning, 1994; Rhoads & Black, 1995). Such practices cultivate an understanding of diverse perspectives as well as the ability to be more critical consumers of knowledge (Freire, 2002; hooks, 1994; McLaren, 1995). The ultimate goal is to foster in students a sense of commitment to their own learning as well as an ability to engage in democratic citizenship (Giroux, 1983). Such a desired outcome reflects to a large degree the notion expressed by Boyer (1987), that students need to develop an integrated view of knowledge that will bridge academic learning with real-world experiences.

In this paper, theories of democratic learning will be explored and applied to the experience of one large, public research university that sought to create more engaging and effective learning opportunities for its undergraduates through one-unit reading and discussion seminars. More to the point, we stress democratic learning and the value of education for citizenship, particularly citizenship within an increasingly global environment.

Background

Our study is situated at Western University, a pseudonym for a large, research university located in the Western region of the U.S. In particular, we examine a one-unit seminar program implemented at Western during the fall of 2001 in response to the events of September 11.

Western is part of a multi-campus system and has an approximate student enrollment of 36,000 students (24,000 undergraduate and 12,000 graduate students). Programmatically

speaking, Western is comprised of the College of Letters and Science, eleven professional schools, and 22 organized research units. Ethnic minorities comprise 59.5 percent of the undergraduate population, with Asian Americans constituting the largest minority population (33.9 percent). The female to male ratio is approximately 60 to 40.

Perhaps serendipity plays a bigger part in shaping academic life than most of us care to admit. This may be the case in point at Western, when in the fall of 2001 the university instituted a program of one-unit seminars as a response to the events of September 11.

On the morning of September 11, several academic leaders assembled to determine how they might help students deal with the aftermath of the tragic events that had just occurred. The Fall Quarter had not yet begun, and the Chancellor was particularly concerned with maintaining student safety and assisting student understanding. The Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education suggested that the university offer a series of one-unit seminars during the Fall Quarter to help students examine the events of September 11 from a variety of perspectives and to foster informal interactions among faculty, staff, and students during a period of crisis and uncertainty. Prior to September 11, proposals for a series of one-unit seminars had been met with hesitation, as most faculty were used to teaching four-unit courses and some did not see how the one-unit seminar model would benefit student learning. However, in light of a national crisis, faculty responded positively. The one-unit seminar model was endorsed not only by senior administrators, including the Chancellor who agreed to teach a seminar himself, but also by key faculty leaders. Consequently, a seminar series titled *Perspectives on September 11* was established in a matter of days.

It was decided that the seminars would be offered through an existing course structure known as the Honors Collegium (a course component of Western's Honors Program). An

umbrella course description was created and all course proposals were reviewed by a faculty committee. All students, regardless of participation in the Honors Program, were eligible to enroll. The Faculty Senate Chair emailed a call-to-action to all Academic Senate members on September 17 and in less than two weeks, 50 seminars had been approved and were available for student enrollment (Western operates on a quarter system and classes were scheduled to begin near the end of September).

All seminars focused on topics related to the events of September 11, and collectively they offered a wide variety of perspectives. Some seminars focused on particular aspects of September 11, such as exploring the Taliban or understanding terrorism. Others examined broad-based policies such as national security and civil rights in a terrorist environment. Still others focused on more personal issues such as understanding post-traumatic stress and promoting tolerance. Examples of course titles included: *Terror and Its Psychological Impact, Women's Participation in Political Violence, Terror and the Dilemmas of American Power, Globalization and Its Discontents,* and *Understanding the Taliban.*

To provide an intimate learning environment and to promote increased student-faculty interaction, seminars were limited to 15 students. All undergraduates were eligible to enroll, but preference was given to first- and second-year students. Students were notified of the opportunity to enroll in the seminar series via their university email accounts, the university's website, the schedule of classes, advertisements in the student newspaper, and flyers circulated in the residence halls and among student affairs and academic advising units. Within the first week of classes, 49 of the 50 seminars had sufficient enrollment; one was cancelled due to lack of enrollment.

Early in the Fall Quarter, a decision was made that a second set of seminars, again focusing on the aftermath of September 11th, would be offered in the Winter Quarter. The series titled, *Perspectives Post September 11*, consisted of 37 seminars with various themes similar to those offered in the fall. The seminars were again offered through the Honors Collegium and were open to all students regardless of participation in the Honors Program. Seminars were reviewed by the same group of faculty who approved fall courses.

The program continued into the Spring Quarter, during which time a decision was made to continue the one-unit seminar series the following year and beyond. In the fall of 2002, the university offered a new program of seminars. Each year the university would now offer a program of one-unit seminars focused on the many paths of discovery explored by its faculty; thus, the seminars were no longer limited to a focus on the events of September 11. The hallmark of the seminar series was to be the opportunity to engage in lively and stimulating dialogues with students and faculty in a less formalized environment than is typical of most classes.

Democratic Learning and Global Citizenship

Obviously, the implementation of one-unit seminars as a means of engaging undergraduate students is not a new idea. At present, over 70 percent of the 4000-plus postsecondary institutions in the United States offer first-year seminars of one kind or another (National Research Center, 2000). Consequently, the contribution of this article relates not so much to the general value of one-unit seminars, but instead centers on informing faculty and student affairs professionals of the role such seminars can play in the promotion of more democratic learning environments and the development of students as

global citizens. Of particular note here is the fact that Western's seminars centered a great deal on global events tied to September 11. Given the complex socio-political dynamics that characterize an increasingly global community, such educational experiences may be needed now more than ever.

Democratic theories of education offer faculty and practitioners alike an approach to pedagogy that promotes a complex array of aptitudes necessary for learning and participation in civic life. In this paper, we draw key themes from democratic educational theory as a means of framing what we envision as civic-minded, student-centered learning. Most importantly, we draw from arguments made by Dewey (1944) that democracy depends on an educated citizenry capable of making critical decisions about communal life. This involves the ability to reflect on one's own place in society, as well as the place of others (Rhoads, 1997a, 1998).

In addition to Dewey, contemporary scholars also have argued that schooling plays a vital role in preparing citizens for meaningful participation in a democratic society (Giroux, 1983; hooks, 1994; Gutmann, 1987; McLaren, 1995). However, cultivating the skills necessary for responsible democratic citizenship may necessitate a rethinking of how learning is facilitated within college and university settings (Shor, 1987). We contend that literature on democratic education tends to describe five key elements of student-centered learning environments: meaningful and egalitarian dialogue, problem-based inquiry, inclusion of the self (including individual student experience and self-reflection), a recognition of the co-construction of knowledge, and situating teaching and learning within the larger socio-political context.

Dialogue is the practice of verbal exchange of thoughts and ideas. It must be approached as a means to develop one's thoughts on a particular subject rather than serving simply an end in itself (Macedo, 2002). Freire (2002) noted that the value of dialogue is that it allows one to recognize the social as well as individual aspects of knowledge construction and acquisition. Dialogue allows students to learn to examine their own assumptions and values as well as those of their fellow students and teachers (Giroux, 1983).

True dialogue requires an atmosphere of egalitarianism in which each participant's views and opinions are valued. As hooks argued, "There must be an ongoing recognition that everyone influences the classroom dynamic, that everyone contributes" (1994, p. 8). Such an atmosphere is best achieved when the traditional authority of the teacher as expert is brought into question and the role of the student as recipient of factual knowledge is rejected (Friere, 2002). Arguably, at a time when society is in greater need than ever of sound methods for exploring differences across lines of cultural demarcation, dialogue should be utilized as a tool to enable students to cross cultural boundaries and develop the skills necessary for sustained and collaborative inquiry (Burbules & Rice, 1991; Tierney, 1993).

Another important element of democratic education is the utilization of problem-posing or problem-based learning. Such an approach was long ago advocated by Dewey (1944), when he emphasized the need to situate learning in the context of day-to-day life. As Freire (2002) later noted, a learning environment that puts forth a certain real-life problem allows an individual to place issues within a particular context. Freire (2002) explained, "Students, as they are increasingly posed with problems relating to themselves in the world and with the world, will feel increasingly challenged and obliged to respond to that challenge" (p. 81). In turn, when students see the connection between problems posed in the

context of undergraduate education and their own lived experiences, they are more likely to seek to address such problems through action and/or inquiry. This sense of personal commitment provides for a greater level of engagement in learning (Baxter-Magolda, 1998, 1999).

A third key element of democratic classrooms is a recognition that students bring selves to the learning context (hooks, 1994; Rhoads, 1997a). Recognizing students as selves involves valuing the experience and knowledge students possess. The pedagogical challenge becomes one of creating spaces and opportunities for students to share their experience and knowledge. The sharing of students' lived experience and their experientially based understandings of the world is key, because it offers an opportunity for critical investigation and self-reflection. Students' experiences should not go unquestioned; problem-posing and challenging questions must be brought to bear on students' experiences. For example, Simon (1992) argued that, "We must challenge the very character of experience, make clear its variety of forms, and explore the differing implications of each form" (p. 124). Experience must be explored and analyzed to understand more fully their meaning and to consider how each student's perspective is a complex reflection of both individual and social realities.

An important facet of exploring the selves students bring to the learning context involves challenging students to critically reflect on their own lives and experiences. The key point here is that in democratic learning environments, students have the opportunity to learn from one another and incorporate such learning into new constructions of knowledge and self. Dewey (1944) claimed that when we "reflect upon an experience instead of just having it, we inevitably distinguish between our own attitude and the objects toward which we sustain the attitude" (p. 166). Reflection becomes a key element in students

reformulating their lives and charting new directions or deepening existing commitments and staying the course.

A fourth key element relates to the co-construction of knowledge and the role students play as active participants in such a process. Constructivist views of knowledge go against more traditional views in which educators are seen as the holders of knowledge and students are situated as the recipients of knowledge. Freire (2002) described such a view of teaching and learning as the *"banking concept"*—teachers literally make a deposit of cultural capital into the students' brains. Banking education conveys the idea that in typical educational settings teachers alone are the creators of knowledge, while students are simply indiscriminate consumers, amassing a neutral bank of knowledge.

From the perspective of Freire (2002) and hooks (1994), it is only when the banking model is eradicated that students and educators will co-create an engaging learning context that operates in a democratic fashion. The goal is to create a learning environment in which students perceive themselves as teachers as well as learners and educators view the environment as one where they too are learning. In such an environment, students are more likely to become critical consumers and creators of knowledge (McLaren, 1995). Furthermore, critical consumers and co-creators of knowledge are highly needed within democratic societies in that such societies are dependent upon their citizenry to sustain meaningful public engagement. A democratic society in which its citizens no longer actively participate in community decision making and public engagement ceases to be truly democratic (Dewey, 1944).

A fifth key aspect of democratic educational theory is the role that education ought to play in challenging students and educators to situate their own lives within the larger socio-

political context (Freire, 2002). As hooks (1994) argued, "The engaged voice must never be fixed and absolute but always changing, always evolving in dialogue with a world beyond itself" (p. 11). However, such a process implies that a particular world, or a particular socio-political context, exists and is readily accessible to students and educators. We contend that identifying the socio-political context becomes increasingly difficult as a society moves toward globalization, but nonetheless such efforts must form a centerpiece of democratic education (McLaren, 2001; McLaren & Farahmandpur, 2001).

In previous eras, it may have been possible for students and educators to interpret their lived-experiences within the more narrow context of U.S. society. Conservative students could, for example, connect their lives and interests to an understanding of the rise of neoconservatism inspired by the Reagan/Bush years. African American students could situate their own struggles within the context of the civil rights movement or more recent efforts to end racial inequality. Women had the opportunity to connect their own lives and experiences to various positions suggested by the broader struggle for women's rights and equal opportunity. But situating one's life within a broader societal context becomes increasingly difficult when the nature of society takes on global characteristics. Is it even possible to articulate clear positions that capture the socio-political reality of contemporary societies?

The national or societal-level context may be inadequate for framing the socio-political realities of today's students and educators. Instead, such discussions need to take into consideration the growing global influences shaping the nature of social reality. Fittingly, the events of September 11 cause one to question whether notions of citizenship and civic competency may be fully understood in a national context or whether a broader

global framework is now required. Along this line of thought, Torres (1998, 2002) situated civic competency within a broader, global environment and argued that historically, education was framed by its role within the nation-state. But contemporary societies are now marked by blurred and permeable boundaries and citizens experience increased cross-cultural interactions. Torres further posited that democratic forms of pedagogy are best suited for constructing the kind of meaningful interactions and learning contexts necessary for fostering diverse, global understandings, as well as posing challenges to various aspects of globalization.

Ultimately, democratic pedagogies seek to apply the aforementioned tenets with the goal of fostering life-long learners (Mayo, 1999). In terms of the collegiate context, the desired outcome is developing a culture of undergraduate education that recognizes the importance of egalitarian dialogue, utilizes problem-posing, legitimizes personal experience while fostering self-reflexivity, recognizes that knowledge is socially constructed, and connects the lives of educators and students to broader societal and global issues. Such an approach is more likely to nurture critical and engaged students equipped with the skills and aptitudes necessary to participate meaningfully in the public sphere (Dewey, 1944; Freire, 2002; Shor, 1987; Simon, 1992; Torres, 1998).

Method

The purpose of this study was to examine the experience of students and instructors participating in one-unit seminars centered on the events of September 11. The data collection tool was a survey administered via email communications to all students and faculty who participated in a seminar during either Fall Quarter 2001 or Winter Quarter

2002. The survey included Likert-scale and "yes-no-maybe" type questions, as well as a series of open-ended questions. Consequently, both quantitative and qualitative data were collected and utilized in analyzing the experiences of participants.

A total of 236 students participated in the study in Fall Quarter 2001 and 179 students participated in Winter Quarter 2002 (a total of 415 students). All enrolled students received an email notification requesting their participation in the study and assurance that their responses would be confidential. No incentives were offered for participating in the study, but those who did not respond to the initial email received subsequent reminders that their participation was important. The combined response rate for Fall and Winter Quarters was 42 percent (see Table 1). The survey respondents were broadly representative of the enrolled student population.

Table 1. Student Participants and Respondents

	Fall		Winter	
Cohorts of Students*	**No. of Participants (%)**	**No. of Respondents (%)**	**No. of Participants (%)**	**No. of Respondents (%)**
Students entering 2001	209 (37%)	99 (42%)	243 (57%)	119 (66%)
Students entering 2000	190 (34%)	76 (32%)	97 (23%)	35 (20%)
Students entering 1999 or before	160 (29%)	61 (26%)	84 (20%)	25 (14%)
Total	559	236	424	179

*Reflects students entering in Fall, Winter, or Spring of that academic year.

A total of 53 faculty participated in teaching the 49 seminars in the fall. In the winter, a total of 40 faculty taught 37 seminars. The number of faculty who participated is greater than the number of seminars offered due to the fact that several were team-taught. We should also note that our use of the terms "instructors" and/or "faculty" primarily refers to teaching faculty in tenure-track positions, but also includes adjunct or affiliate professors and lecturers, with some members of the latter two groups coming from the ranks of full-time administrators and student affairs staff.

Instructors received an email from the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education requesting their participation in the evaluation at the end of each quarter. Non-respondents received a second email from the Vice Provost once again soliciting their participation. The response rate for the fall was 62 percent (33 instructors responded) and the rate for the winter was 80 percent (32 instructors responded). Table 2 provides comparisons of the seminar instructors and the cohort of respondents. It should be noted that 33 percent of the faculty who taught a seminar in the Fall Quarter chose to teach again in the Winter Quarter.

Table 2. Instructors and Respondents*

	Fall		Winter	
Unit	**No. of Instructors (%)**	**No. of Respondents (%)**	**No. of Instructors (%)**	**No. of Respondents (%)**
College Faculty (Letters & Science)	35 (66%)	19 (58%)	26 (65%)	24 (75%)
Professional School Faculty	9 (17%)	7 (21%)	9 (23%)	7 (22%)
Others	9 (17%)	7 (21%)	5 (12%)	1 (3%)
Total	53	33	40	32

* Professional School Faculty included faculty from: Arts and Architecture, Education and Information Studies, Law, Medicine, Nursing, Public Policy and Social Research. Others included administrators and student affairs staff without faculty appointments.

Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected and analyzed. The qualitative data were derived from a series of open-ended questions included on the survey. The focus of this paper centers on the analysis of the more textual, qualitative data. We chose to focus on the qualitative data simply because we found it to be much richer and to provide more extensive insight into furthering understanding of the educational relevance of one-unit seminars. In addition, "Qualitative research methods that seek to build understanding and discover meaning are immensely practical for student affairs educators" (Manning, 1992, p. 133).

Textual data were analyzed using a two-step process. First, we used an inductively-driven, content analysis approach, as we sought to identify key themes evident in the narrative responses of students and faculty (Maxwell, 1996). An initial read of comments was conducted and a list of possible themes were identified. The textual data were then coded based on the previously identified themes. This process produced some data fields disconnected from our theoretical orientation centered on democratic education.

In step two of the data analysis, we engaged in a more deductive process (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). In this case, we identified key elements of democratic educational theory and then imposed such elements on the data through a process of identifying text that support or refute the presence of these democratic markers. Here, we were more or less testing our hypothesis that the one-unit seminars reflected many of the pedagogical elements outlined in democratic educational theory. Such a strategy falls in line with methodologies associated with critical social science (Fay, 1987).

In the end, we wound up with one data category created more inductively—mattering (which also addressed our concern for democratic classrooms)—and four data categories deductively derived—global awareness, dialogue, students as knowledge makers, and self-reflection. Thus, by engaging our data both inductively and deductively, we allowed for key themes to emerge in a more "grounded theory" approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), but then we also were able to test our hunch about the contribution of the one-unit seminars to democratic learning through a more theoretically-driven approach.

Findings

Based on our inductive and deductive analysis of the textual data, five key themes emerged: global awareness, the importance of dialogue, students as knowledge makers, self-

reflection, and mattering. In what follows, we highlight these five key themes through explanation and the use of selected comments from students and instructors participating in the one-unit seminar program.

Global Awareness. Students affirmed that they gained insights that assisted them in understanding various aspects and multiple perspectives of September 11. As one student explained, "It helped me understand some of the differences, culturally and religiously, between the West and Middle East. It put some important cultural differences in perspective." Students expressed a desire to obtain basic knowledge, such as historical and political knowledge, as well as assistance in processing the complex events and their aftermath. Students explained that it was an important forum for intelligent discussion of global issues with fellow students and experienced faculty members. In addition, they felt that the seminars assisted them, to varying degrees, in understanding better the events arising from September 11.

For some students, the seminar was an important means of gathering perspectives not often presented through the U.S. media. One student commented, "We discussed aspects of the conflict, Western society and Islam that our media has not touched upon." Similarly, a second student noted, "The course I took helped me to have a broader perspective about the different issues that may have come into play regarding the September 11 events. I find that I have a better understanding of world affairs that are not always presented in the news or media, and that I have a better perspective about the cultural differences and values that continue to sprout the clashes between our nation and others."

Students engaged in dialogues that assisted them in better comprehending how the U.S. might be perceived around the world. One student addressed this point: "I feel I have a

much better understanding of how the U.S. is viewed by other countries, and what the U.S. can try and do to change those perceptions." Another echoed this comment: "I had no idea of the extent of Anti-American sentiments and the justification throughout the world. Additionally, the seminar that I took helped me understand much more of what is going on in the world as a reaction to the 9/11 tragedy."

Instructors also noted an increased sense of global awareness among students. One instructor commented, "Students developed a more advanced understanding of the global environment in which the U.S. and other countries now operate." A second added, "In my seminars, some students seemed to feel that they understood the present situation better. More importantly, the group as a whole felt more inclined to explore world events by reading newspapers beyond what they were accustomed to, which, in some cases, was little or not at all." Instructors perceived students as engaged and interested in obtaining perspectives that transcended U.S. borders. "I had very positive comments from the students," explained one instructor. "They said this was one of the best opportunities they have had at [Western] to learn about the rest of the world." Another commented on the usefulness of developing more global perspectives: "I think that students appreciated the importance of learning about cultures different from their own. This prepares them better to live in a post-September 11 world." And another instructor added, "I hope that it gave them a better idea about the widely different views that can exist about the roles of the U.S. in the world and a greater ability to understand issues from a variety of perspectives."

Importance of Dialogue. Students found the seminar format to be very conducive to stimulating dialogue. Given the small size of the seminars (15 students or less), students reported a much greater sense of ease about participating in discussions and sharing their

own perspectives. At the most basic level, the importance of dialogue was evident in comments such as the following: I was "easily able to share my opinion"; there was a "sharing of ideas and opinions"; "class discussions were thought-provoking and never lagged"; and "It helped me express my feelings to others, allowing me to think about issues that I would not have noticed had it not been for the other students."

Students consistently made the point that classroom discussions were stimulating and challenging. The fact that the seminars were offered only on a "pass/no pass" (P/N) basis allowed many students to focus on their own contributions to and understandings of seminar discussions, rather than concern themselves with posturing and devising strategies to obtain the best grade possible. There was a strong perception that the one-unit seminars offered increased freedom to learn purely for the sake of learning. The smaller class size, the discussion format, and P/N grading all seemed to contribute to such a perception.

The emphasis on dialogue was particularly useful in engaging students in conversations that offered new perspectives from co-participants. Several students expressed views along these lines: "discussions were thoughtful and mind-opening"; "we always discussed September 11 from various perspectives and it really helped my understanding"; "I thoroughly enjoyed being able to talk one-on-one with the professor and other students. I felt it helped me learn more, in many different ways."; "A lot more interaction with students provides a more relaxed and yet better learning environment." Students also noted the advantages of engaging in dialogue with instructors, as opposed to having to listen passively to them lecture. As one student explained, "This interaction was of higher quality because it was a discussion of issues, ideas, and so forth and not just asking questions of the professors in big lectures." Quantitatively speaking, 94 (fall) and 92 (winter) percent of the students

reported that the one-unit seminars afforded greater opportunity for student-faculty interaction than typical lecture-oriented courses.

Through sustained dialogue students were able to directly engage one another and the instructors and explore various perspectives collaboratively. Faculty also reported that students were engaged in rich dialogue with one another. As one faculty member explained, "The students have actively participated in the course, writing weekly journals and discussing current events each week. They've said the seminar has been valuable to them, providing a forum for analyzing these events and sharing in on-going dialogue with colleagues." Instructors also commented on the quality of interaction and dialogue between students: "Students are much more open to expression during the class rather than just asking questions."

Students as Knowledge Makers. Closely tied to the highly dialogical aspect of the one-unit seminars is the notion of students as legitimate sources of knowledge. The cultivation of student-to-student and student-to-faculty engagement was empowering for students not only in that it allowed for self-expression, but also it helped them view one another as legitimate sources of knowledge. From the qualitative data, it was very apparent that students perceived themselves as active co-participants in the classroom. This was evident in their descriptions of interacting with and learning from other students, and especially in their experiences with faculty. Students consistently alluded to a general feeling of freedom to express themselves and influence the direction of discussion.

There was a clear perception that a collaborative, highly interactive setting provided an environment that was more conducive to active learning. One student alluded to the active aspect of knowledge construction in the one-unit seminars: "Due to our differences—

whether it be gender, race, religion, etc.—we were able to share a lot of different points of view. More importantly, we were able to draw different meanings out of readings and discussions and share them with each other."

Students viewed faculty as engaged, co-participants who had interest in the subject matter and were supportive of student expression. There was a general perception that student voices should be heard and valued, and that faculty worked to create an open space to this end. In explaining the nature of the classroom environment, one student explained, "We were treated as equals and our opinions were valued." Students expressed a sense of partnership or equality in the classroom. There was an expectation that students should be active knowledge makers alongside the instructor. Student comments reflected a sense of shared partnership in the classroom. As one student explained, "We discussed the class theme as a group rather than as a professor teaching us." Another student provided deeper insight into this aspect of the classroom environment: "The instructor most often placed himself at the same level as the students in the class through his interactions—he simply made the class an open forum in which he contributed his knowledge and opinions when appropriate, in the exact same manner that he expected from the students."

Faculty too noted the positive impact of co-participation: "Students are much more open to expression during the class rather than just asking questions. This gave me a better sense of what they were thinking." A second added, "Every student in class participated in the discussions, and each of them brought his/her own perspective. So the class interaction was very enriching for all the participants."

Faculty also pointed out how co-participation was a positive experience not just for the students, but for themselves as well: "It was an opportunity to help students, and me,

think through some of the issues raised for civil society." One faculty member's comment on the value of the one-unit seminars seemed to crystallize their overall benefit and the idea of "students as knowledge makers": "[The seminar] was a chance to read things because they care and are interested, and to discuss because they have things they want to teach and learn from each other. On however small a scale, these courses can be a reminder of what higher education really should be."

Self-Reflection. Another theme that emerged from the data, though not as pronounced as the three preceding themes, was the relevance of self-reflection. Students explained that through their exposure to new ideas and others' perspectives, they were inclined to reflect upon their own experiences and assumptions about the world. As one student noted, "This class helped me to *think* from a different perspective." A second student added, "I have gained an entirely new perspective on the events of September 11th that has made me question and challenge my own views…I am now more aware of other issues surrounding these events, but more importantly, I am now aware of myself and my attitude toward these events." Some students commented that upon reflection, they were moved to assume new positions on certain topics. As one explained, "[The seminar] helped me to see how the events have made other students feel and to reformulate some of my own opinions."

Similarly, faculty also commented on the value of students having to be a little more introspective than is normally expected in a course: "Students [were] encouraged to explore and. . . challenged to go deeper with their ideas." A second added, "Given the feedback we got from the students in the course, it made them re-question and re-evaluate their value system." And a third faculty member spoke of the value of small group interaction and its role in challenging students: "Students are held accountable for their ideas in small group

discussions. They must come to trust their own minds. Seminars encourage students to think and do."

Mattering. Like the self-reflection theme, mattering also was a secondary data category. Students expressed an appreciation that the seminar environment was one where they were known by their fellow students as well as the teaching faculty. There was a distinct recognition that, unlike in large lecture courses, faculty knew students by their names and expressed an active interest in their opinions and experiences. As one student explained, "The professor remembered who I was. To him I was not just another ID number." This lack of anonymity in the classroom helped students feel that their presence was of import and that their opinions mattered. Students expressed satisfaction with the fact that faculty actually knew their names and displayed interest in their well being.

The feeling of mattering was also captured in faculty efforts to construct a comfortable space where students would feel empowered to participate. As one student commented, "The professor knew our names and went out of his way to get us involved. The atmosphere was friendly and comfortable." Confirmation of the value of such an environment for students was illustrated by the following statement: "My professor was very interested in hearing the ideas of all the students. You could also tell that she herself was tremendously interested in the subject." Another student echoed these remarks: "The professors were really interested in what the students thought, and vice versa." The affirmation of being known by a teacher, accompanied by a genuine interest in students was expressed by the following student's comments: "I loved my Perspectives [on September 11] class because the professor was very interested in our experiences and what we had to say.

He really made an effort to get to know the students in his seminar. The professor always wanted to hear what the students had to say."

Discussion

Our findings concerning the one-unit seminar program at Western suggest two key issues to consider as we think about ways of improving undergraduate education, especially at large research universities. First, our study calls attention to the pedagogical structure of one-unit seminars and the possibility for enhancing democratic learning opportunities. Colleges and universities probably rely too much on large courses as a means of conveying knowledge and information. The vast majority of such courses reflect the "banking concep of education in which teachers serve as the experts—the keepers of knowledge—and stude are simply empty vessels to be filled with information (Freire, 2002). Although such a structure may work from time to time, it is clearly not the best way to convey the idea that students can play an active role in the construction of knowledge. Nor is such a structure helpful in developing dispositions and skills related to citizenship and active involvement i a global, democratic society.

Recall from our literature review of democratic educational theories that we identifi five key elements that classrooms ought to exhibit. To reiterate, these are: meaningful and egalitarian dialogue, problem-based inquiry, inclusion of the self, recognition of the co-construction of knowledge, and situating learning within the larger socio-political context. Based on our analysis of student and faculty comments, all of these elements were more or less evident. Clearly, students and faculty voiced numerous comments about the importanc of dialogue and engaging in the co-construction of knowledge. Aspects of problem-based education were evident in findings linked to "students as knowledge makers," in that the

basic problem-based structure of the seminar enabled students and faculty to collaborate in seeking meaning for the events of September 11. Issues relevant to the inclusion of the self were evident in comments students and faculty made about self-reflection and how class discussions challenged students to rethink their own self-understandings and at times "re-question and re-evaluate their value system." Finally, given the focus on the events of September 11, the seminars clearly helped students to situate their own lives within the broad socio-political context of an increasingly global world.

Our inductively-derived findings related to mattering are also worth noting, especially given the importance of mattering to student development in general (Schlossberg, Lynch, & Chickering, 1989). Additionally, mattering also is consistent with views of democratic citizenship. For example, Dewey (1944) long ago argued that the greatness of a true democracy is that every citizen has the opportunity to centribute to one's community and the social connections that define oneself in relation to others. In other words, in a democracy each citizen ought to matter. If colleges and universities desire to prepare students for meaningful participation in the broader society, then it is incumbent upon such institutions to create learning opportunities where students truly matter. Mattering is a key aspect of conveying to students that they too can become participants in the social construction of knowledge and meaning. This is particularly a concern at large research universities where the opportunities undergraduates have to engage with educators in meaningful dialogue may be limited.

A second major point of our findings relates to the idea of global citizenship. Most colleges and universities acknowledge their role in preparing students for meaningful civic participation in the larger society (Barber, 1992; Guarasci, Cornwell, & Associates, 1997;

Jacoby & Associates, 1996; Rhoads, 1997a; Sax, 2000). However, the events of September 11, 2001 call attention to the changing nature of society and citizenship. We can no longer simply think of citizenship as defined within the context of a nation-state, but instead we need to examine citizenship and civic education within the broader context of a global society. Consequently, one-unit reading and discussion seminars are powerful opportunities for colleges and universities to attend to the global qualities of the contemporary society that citizens must navigate. In addition to the democratic potential of the pedagogical structure of one-unit seminars, organizing themes relevant to globalization and global citizenship add to their impact. In the case of the Western program, the seminars centered on the events of September 11 contributed significantly to framing meaningful discussions around global issues and trends.

Finally, much emphasis has been placed on creating effective learning environments through the cultivation of more collaborative, democratic learning environments (Freire, 2002; hooks, 1994; Joint Task Force on Student Learning, 1998). As the *Wingspread Declaration on Renewing the Civic Mission of the American Research University* asserts, in order to renew and reinvigorate democracy, students must learn, "...the arts of public argument, civic imagination, the ability to critically evaluate arguments and information, the capacities and curiosity to listen constantly...and problem solving in ways that deepen appreciation of others' talent" (1998, p.5). Our findings of the one-unit seminar program support assertions that democratic pedagogies foster active student learning, meaningful engagement, and the sort of citizenship skills Dewey (1944) deemed critical to the vitality of a democratic society. Furthermore, although the ultimate decision to implement reading and discussion seminars is likely to rest with the teaching faculty, we see student affairs

professionals and academic support personnel as key players in advancing such efforts. At Western, for example, student affairs professionals and academic support staff played a vital role both in teaching (or co-teaching) various seminars as well as in providing support for the development and promotion of the overall program. Given their extensive knowledge of and commitment to student development, including citizenship development, it is quite likely that student affairs staff will play increasingly important roles in advancing the overall undergraduate learning experience, especially in the area of civic education.

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